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ABSTRACT

A look at various methods of evaluating vocational education and training in Europe shows traditional practices (correlated with results and objectives) using new interactive approaches. Because of the great variety of situations, levels of awareness, diversity of tools, and multiplicity of participants, the improvement of evaluation practices could not be linear. The conditions for implementation of an interactive evaluation are established gradually. Interactive approaches are being implemented by the structuring of the dialogue between representatives of employers, public authorities, trainers, and trained persons. With both traditional and interactive approaches being used, more can be known about the effects of program implementation, such as the duration and the quality of alliances, the motivation of contributors, the creation of a set of reference values, the continuity of the dialogue, and the gathering of evaluation results for the improvement of vocational training. The countries which have tried to improve the evaluation process have achieved progress in several directions: (1) the development of exchanges between institutions; (2) the establishment of reliable local data; (3) the progress of research; (4) development and diversification of partnerships; and (5) increases in the volume, scale, and diversification of joint financing schemes. Other types of improvements include increased cooperation among the countries, identity, and access to vocational training. (Contains 11 references.) (KC)

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**Responsible editors:**
Erast Stehl, Director
Corrado Politi, Deputy Director
Enrique Retuerto de la Torre, Deputy Director

CEDEFOP
Maria Pierret,
Project Coordinator
Tel.: 030/884 12 123

# EVALUATION OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN A TERRITORIAL CONTEXT

## Introduction:

For some years we have been seeing renewed interest in measures of evaluation of vocational training activities and policies to support and revitalize the local socio-economic fabric.

Also, after the Limoges conference (CEDEFOP, June 1990) at which numerous evaluation experts from the twelve member-States took the floor, the Centre relaunched the theme of evaluation of vocational training in a territorial context.

From the results of the studies which they presented, some speakers at Limoges contributed information on regional practices in the evaluation of vocational training. Others proposed a method of evaluation based on the assumption that an observable and measurable relationship exists between training activity-objectives defined 'ex ante' and the results observed 'ex post'. Others again simply described ideas following from their own experiences.

At the DG XVI - on regional policy - of the Commission of the European Communities, the initiative had been taken to accompany the setting-up of Integrated European Programmes (IEP). Thus, alongside the notion of evaluation 'ex ante' and 'ex post' which had frequently been alluded to, the idea of evaluation "on the way" found a place.
Flash 5/90 echoed these varied contributions and the many possible inputs which they represented in the problem of evaluating vocational training. The conference marked a great moment for the clarification of numerous questions.

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whilst providing the participants, the Commission and CEDEFOP with an opportunity to pose new ones.

I. Evaluation 'ex ante', evaluation 'ex post'

In a context of methodological reflection, analysis of needs, more comprehensively, evaluation 'ex ante', is often presented as an inescapable assumption. In the logical process of balancing effects recognized 'ex post' with objectives (responses to needs) identified 'ex ante', this principle has its whole meaning. At the cost of radical "decomplexification" of real situations, it can undoubtedly be applied.

The difficulty of defining training objectives 'ex ante' within a regional reference context cannot be underestimated.

The regional leaders who wished to organize Integrated Development Operations (I.D.O.'s) in which training had a supporting and levering role had to go beyond the traditional divisions still in force at the various levels of national and local government. They had only partial success. Some years after the FEDER decided to allocate 20% of the annual budget to these I.D.O.'s, because the member-States did not submit Integrated Development Programmes to the FEDER this part of the budget had not yet been completely allocated.

In some regions, drawing up a programme forms part of the administrative routine. Designed in offices, the programming ultimately merely maintains the status quo; the programmes feed the trading between the regional principal towns, the capitals and the administrators of the Common Funds.
Objectives - very generous, it must be added - can be determined by the priorities of European and national policies. The prospect of big financial support can shorten long studies on the ground.
The first series of observations, made in researches by the Centre from '88 to '89, related to 'ex post' evaluation practices. It was found that the results of these evaluations had not been compared with those of 'ex ante' analyses. Since 'ex ante' analysis had not been carried out, or had not been done with sufficient accuracy, there would have been no sense in comparing the results of the one type with the other.

In practice, 'ex ante' analysis encounters many obstacles. At the regional level, the production of data which would make it feasible and reliable - reliable, that is, for



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comparison with an 'ex post' situation - can be attempted. However, will it be enlightening in the 'a posteriori' interpretation of the results of a training programme? Certainly not without taking some methodological precautions and, first of all, using the information which it offers as reference points,amongst others.

As D. Lipari writes already in 1989 in an article on the evaluation of actions of public authorities, for No. 49 of the journal "Il progetto": "evaluation cannot be confined to mechanical recording and to simple analytical treatment of the results considered in relation to the objectives (of greater or lesser explicitness) of policies; but it must relate to the whole process which nas produced these results. The reasons which make necessary this widening of the radius of action for evaluation are bound up essentially with the specific nature of open-ended processes and can in no case be predetermined by public actions. An important consequence of this interpretation, which has crucial implications for the problems of evaluation,concerns the fundamental limits and inadequacy of methodological approaches of evaluation based upon reasoning in terms of objectives and results.

## II. Interactive evaluation

Contrary to a wholly theoretical notion, the definition of needs and of the various stages of a project is not done in a mechanical chronological sequence according to the level of responsibilities of the participants, namely policies, administrations, trainers, enterprises, individuals. They would have to be conceived in a dynamic process in which those concerned are all involved, at the same time, in varying degrees in the course of it. As the author of the Italian report concludes: it is necessary to pass from "a mechanical, deterministic rationality to a logic 'dialogo-discorsiva' ".

In this interactive logic, all of the participants are decision-makers; they construct a system of values according to the importance attached to this or that problem, a task of weighting which is the subject of many negotiations. These are not all formalized, and the opinion of important participants is sometimes forgotten. Thus, the ultimate recipients of the training are not always thought of; but on them depends much of the success. According to the French author, a correction is appearing in initial training. The unemployed themselves depend upon the trade unions for representation. The opinions of other participants - essential for successful running of programmes - namely the trainers, are not taken into account sufficiently in the stages preceding training



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activity itself. Motivation can be weakened, and the results affected to that extent, by this.

Even the sensitivity of the public who will utilize the qualifications of the trained persons must be taken into account. Communication with these participants must be improved. The authors of the report on the region of the Basilicate report that in Italy "several interregional consortia exist for the training of agricultural representatives (CIFDA)". They offer high qualifications which are used directly within the region because they satisfy the needs of the moment. There is no planning or co-ordination with the regional council for education and training. Recruitment is not organized, except by 'bush telegraph'. The exemplary hard work done on the course is due to the certainty of getting a job. A shadow is cast over this picture in that a problem of communication exists with the people served by the newly-qualified. The new conception of agriculture is far from being accepted in this region of traditional agriculture. The newly-qualified themselves show discouragement in the face of the prevailing backward conditions of their region, and this feeling is stronger in those who have done their training abroad. This is success compromised.

As the outline report by C. Clozel of the Marseilles team (page 12) shows, between the groups of participants there are continual interaction with feedback, possible emergence of new objectives, new paths, induced effects, corrections of trajectory.

The statement of diagnoses and of aims, for example, is itself an act likely to produce effects. If "the training of the jobless" is the object of a broad consensus in all of the regions, other aims carry risk of dissention; initial "turbulence" which will subsequently make relevant evaluation difficult.

Thus, during the implementation of decisions, a time which greatly influences the long-term effects, new schemes largely rely on the support of what already exists. Resistance to change is at work in this stage. Actually, at this time the role-players in the field of training become more involved. Their behaviour begins to evolve or, on the contrary, to reinforce established tendencies.

Otherwise, the operation of the schemes can be regarded only as that of a machine. Although they have been conceived with objectives and checks, once they are launched the schemes evolve with their own logic and identity, conditions of their effectiveness - conditions, but not a guarantee. In fact, the interplay of



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participants within one and the same category, or the relationships, including those of influence and of power between sub-groups, can produce distortions between effects sought and actual effects of the schemes.

The process of evaluation relates, then, to comprehension of these emerging objectives produced by the operation itself of these systems, so as to understand their nature and their interconnections. What are the systems actually tending towards, and why? This question presupposes a distancing from the objectives as clarified initially. The question of evaluation is no longer quite the same.

Inherent in evaluation, however, is a certain requirement of comparability and of position-finding relative to references; it is inconceivable, therefore, without indicators put in place. The initiative in the interactive process consists in these indicators having been the subject of negotiation and of consensus between partners in assigning to them a value. It is true that the ultimate outcome of rejecting this process would be a series of appraisals - very jumbled, in many instances, and not very likely to be used for the future.

For the Italian 'rapporteur', "the multiplicity of local subjects" have their part in evaluation, since "each of them has particular advantages in relation to organization of the supply of vocational training on offer. Workers seek a job or promotion, employers would like to have better-qualified, cheaper labour, the socio-cultural associations go beyond merely the vocational aspect, whereas trainers might have the intention of improving the supply, its content and its organization."

## III. Problems of linking vocational training with regional development

Within a complex reference context such as that representing "regional development", the limits of traditional evaluation practices are acknowledged. These are conceived from the standpoint of the "results", defining success at the micro-economic level as a function of specific objectives. It relates to the experience of units which are delimited, stable and relatively little affected by external factors or by duration.

From the standpoint of a vocational training activity linked with the development of a region, an evaluation must contribute towards actual management of a programme. As the English 'rapporteur' writes: to an evaluation centred upon the objectives of particular activities must be added an approach centred upon "implementation" of the



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various projects "introduced" into an environment with which the borders are less clearly delimited and whose conditions of execution can be sensitive, owing to a greater degree of independence. The area of development of a territory cannot be delimited, either in time or space, quality or quantity; evaluation must therefore cover voluntarily-interconnected projects, but also independent projects situated within an environment which is very blurred in outline. Within these spheres of action, ever-widening and diffuse, and yet interconnected, the position of vocational training is becoming more and more elusive. Although, in initial training "decontextualized" of employment, evaluation can accept personal criteria when one is referring to an enterprise, other factors are already becoming very critical, namely the organization of work, the levels of qualification, equipment, the style of management, the corporate culture, the motivation of personnel, etc.

At the level of a territory, the multiplicity of the contributors is as great as the diversity of their own contributions, whether regular or occasional, formal or informal. It is striking for a peripheral rural region such as the centre of Wales, where many important processes for the region are initiated at Cardiff, London or Brussels. It is the case for the INEM courses in the Basque Provinces. Everywhere in Spain, the groups targetted by the INEM programmes are the same. The modes of operation are the same everywhere. In the Basque Provinces, it is regretted, moreover, that this extensive standardization lessens the ability of INEM to be an agent of flexible and dynamic local development. Usually it is necessary to go beyond study of the formal interplay between institutions and go as far as analyzing micro-units of a system or sub-systems of agents, in order to understand the evolutionary process of a socio-economic fabric and the behaviour and activities which underlie it.

The component "time", duration, must also be taken into account. Time generates technical problems within the relationship between objectives and results. One does not evaluate the same things in step with the extension of time between training and evaluation. Study of the impact of training, even circumscribed and limited, upon economic redeployment can be a question only of resources and long terms. In order to make proper allowance for the factor time, there would have to be a prior agreement between the various participants as to what can reasonably be evaluated and on the indicators relevant to the various time scales.



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Within a regional context, one cannot confine oneself to training activities connected with immediately available employment, either. Training is an individual right which must be preserved, even if it involves contributing to emigration. General objectives must be left to vocational training, in order to permit adaptation to future developments. In the Basque report, the author speaks about "necessary multi-objectives" of vocational training. Gerard Calais, author of the monograph on the Lorraine region in France, emphasized it in his paper presented at Limoges: "the more general training is, the more it fulfils objectives which are more social than economic (the remotivation of a group of unemployed, for example), the more difficult it is to express evaluation in quantitative terms."

Another factor of complexity in the analysis of the relationships between vocational training and regional development comes from the fact that vocational training generally forms part of a "package" of measures. Those who support it rely upon the effect of the measures as a whole, as much as upon the effect of one or the other of them. How, in Lorraine, can the effects of the vocational training activities for the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises or the retraining of miners be isolated from among all of the effects of the programmes? The "package" of measures is allocated only once; no comparison will ever be possible.

A feature common to all of these packages of measures is the way - both complicated and diffuse - in which they are organized and in which they appear in the list of the total supply of vocational training on offer and of the various aids assigned to the regions with problems. Role-players who have not been until now at the front of the stage, so to speak, are finding themselves involved - if only for a time - with others. Parallel with the customary mechanisms, now running well, there are numerous instances of concerted action and of many staging-points being created. In the relationships between training, development and territory, it is becoming essential to appraise, as the above-mentioned Lorraine author writes, "the cohesion between the new initiatives and the normal supply of training on offer, and economic trends". This appraisal of cohesion, based upon the combined results of several analytical studies, will reduce the margins of error and the uncertainties of evaluation, whilst conferring upon evaluation not only a monitoring role but, above all, its full regulatory function between training schemes and socio-economic development.



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Conclusions

The Centre's observations from 1988 to 1990 and 1990 to 1992 identify traditional practices, correlated with results and objectives, using new interactive approaches. The improvement of practices could not be linear, owing to the great variety of situations, levels of awareness, the diversity of tools and the multiplicity of participants.

The conditions for implementation of an interactive evaluation are established very gradually. Evaluations of individual measures are still the norm, but they are gradually being supplemented by systematic interactive approaches, thanks to the structuring of the dialogue between representatives of firms, public authorities, trainers and trained persons. The two methods of appraisal provide complementary data. Besides the immediate questions connected with recruitment, more can be known about the implementation of programmes with effects more in depth, such as the duration and the quality of alliances, the motivation of contributors, the creation of a set of reference values, the continuity of the dialogue and, above all, the gathering of evaluation results for the "moderation" of vocational training.

Whether it represents the one or the other method of evaluation, the fact of attempting, of tackling it, induces a very beneficial process.

The regions which have applied themselves to it have achieved progress in several directions:

- the development of exchanges between institutions; the increase in the volume and diversification of communications within the regional area. The representatives of institutions are gradually learning to speak the same language. Thanks to this experience, common appraisal can be made of the problems and the solutions to be proposed;
- the fabrication of information. Local agents are becoming aware of the fictitious nature of available statistics. The facilities established on the basis of national data are of little use to them in grasping local realities. Regional leaders are providing themselves with the means to draw up local "socio-economic maps";
- the progress of research. Parallel with development of the statistical tool, bodies are being created whose field of study and observation lies within the realities of the regional sphere;



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- development and diversification of partnerships; regional officials and elected persons together with the agents of the business world and those of training, without excluding the role-players within the socio-cultural spheres, are developing projects in which everyone is involved in some way;

- increasing the volume, the scale and diversification of joint financing schemes.

From another standpoint, gains of a different nature are appearing:

- the region is coming to put itself in a better position in its relations with the government, the Commission of the European Communities and other regions. Its bargaining power is being strengthened, and also its ability to manage sub-regional differences;

- moreover, the region can regain a regional identity which has been seriously affected by the economic recession. It can in practice rehabilitate shut-down factories, bring about the revival of local traditions and knowledge (kept within the region, this knowledge will be useful in enterprises undergoing conversion or being newly created), act effectively to retain within the region qualifications produced by its training bodies and by its local knowledge, which itself confers qualifications.

- within the field of vocational training itself, the supply of training on offer is better structured and access to this supply is facilitated everywhere. Training has also brought itself up to date, with "flexibilisation" in a great variety of forms. Some regions are even becoming "exporters" of qualifications.

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The decision/action spiral

The decisions are interacting with the action; they are the subject of numerous negotiations and changes of course(?) at all stages.